

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Hurricane Sandy's Effect on the October and November 2012 Advance Monthly Sales for Retail & Food Services Report

Can the Census Bureau estimate the effect of Hurricane Sandy on the sales estimates published in the October and November 2012 Advance Monthly Sales for Retail and Food Services Reports?

No. We cannot isolate the effect of Hurricane Sandy on the Advance Monthly Retail Trade and Food Services Survey (MARTS) estimates since the sample is designed to measure retail and food services activity at the national level and not at specific geographic areas.

Even though we cannot isolate the effect, we did receive indications from the companies that the hurricane had both positive and negative effects on the retail sales data. Some firms reported a drop in sales due to permanent or temporary store closures and stores having reduced business due to damage, fewer customers, and/ or lack of employees. On the other hand, some firms reported sales increases due to significant sales of supplies for the affected areas and evacuees purchasing retail and food services in different geographic locales. For companies impacted by Hurricane Sandy, we review their contribution to the estimates to ensure accurate representation to the overall industry estimates.

Please see <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/emergencies/sandy.html> for data from the 2007 Economic Census and other Census Bureau sources on the areas impacted by Hurricane Sandy.

Can the Census Bureau produce monthly retail and food services sales estimates for the affected areas?

No. We cannot separately estimate retail sales for the affected areas since the MARTS sample is designed to estimate sales for the national level only.

Was the Census Bureau able to collect information from firms operating within the affected areas?

Yes, although response from companies in the affected areas lagged behind recent months. However, many large, regional, and other multi-location firms with reporting offices outside the affected areas responded at a normal rate and included sales data for stores, both open and closed, located in the affected areas. For the entire survey, we received 2,579 responses in October and 2,600 responses in November, compared to the previous 12-month range of 2,517 to 2,781 responses. Companies unable to respond in time for the MARTS are contacted as part of our Monthly Retail Trade Survey (MRTS) data collection process, as normal.

Did the Census Bureau change its data collection procedures this month?

Yes. Our data collection staff asked additional questions with regard to the impact of Hurricane Sandy on October and November 2012 sales as part of our regular follow-up.

As a result of Hurricane Sandy, did the Census Bureau modify its usual weighting or estimation methods used to produce advance monthly sales estimates for October and/or November 2012?

No. Because the advance sample is designed to measure retail and food services sales at the national level and not at specific geographic areas; there is not sufficient evidence to support a change.

Has the reliability of the advance monthly sales estimates changed because of Hurricane Sandy?

No, the reliability of the advance estimates as measured by the coefficient of variation for monthly totals and the standard error for month-to-month change has not changed substantially. For the published industries, reported sales for October and November 2012 exhibited variation similar to that for prior months. While a few individual firms reported large increases or decreases in their sales because of the effects of the hurricane, this additional variation was not large enough to substantially affect the reliability of the published estimates.

Did the Census Bureau alter the parameters input to the seasonal adjustment program to produce advance monthly sales estimates for October and/or November 2012?

No. The monthly review process of the seasonal adjustment output and diagnostics did not indicate that adjustments to the parameters were necessary for either month.

Did the Census Bureau change its analytical procedures for the October and/or November 2012 MARTS?

Yes. In addition to the usual analysis done every month, we reviewed independent data sources and discussed the effects of the hurricanes with companies on the survey. For companies impacted by Hurricane Sandy, we reviewed their contribution to the estimates to ensure accurate representation to the overall industry estimates.

What activities are the Census Bureau planning to ensure the affected areas will continue to be accurately represented?

As part of our data collection, we will continue to ask questions that will help us monitor impacts from the affected areas. We will monitor data responses and make adjustments if necessary.

Source: U. S. Census Bureau
Service Sector Statistics Division

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